“TRUMP’S DONE 100 THINGS IN ONE DAY AND STARMER STILL HASNT DONE ANYTHING. WE NEED A TRUMP” SAY THE BRITISH

As someone who conducts focus groups for a living, I was hardly surprised by the poll this week that showed that so many British voters back Donald Trump’s agenda on issues such as migration and free speech.

That’s partly because of the state of public disaffection when it comes to successive governments’ handling of those issues in Britain.

But my lack of surprise was down to something else too. It has become clear from the work I do that many British voters admire Trump’s approach – on policy but, more importantly, on what amounts to his sheer determination.

“I don’t see why we’re all so [bothered] about making other people happy, but not ourselves as a country. Trump gets that,” a middle-aged man, a former Conservative voter, told me in Dudley last week. Another, a retired woman in Bury, said: “He’s done 100 things in one day and Starmer still hasn’t done anything. We need a Trump.”

Across the country, we are hearing the same. People are increasingly fed up that the only change they see in Britain is change for the worse. Promises by the main parties to fix the NHS (National Health Service), control the borders and ease the cost of living crisis, all seem to go unfulfilled.

It is early days, but many voters in this country are looking enviously across the Atlantic at the whirlwind of activity from the newly-installed US president and wishing we could have a bit of the same.

To be clear, this has little to do with his charm, or lack of, and everything to do with the political circumstances of Britain – and how Trump’s approach is perceived by many voters to be the antithesis of the limp approach by successive British prime ministers to the crises affecting migration, housing and the NHS.

While you meet few people who will describe the US President as “a nice person” or even “fair”, such is public frustration with the state of Britain that these things no longer matter.

Ask someone what they think of the Prime Minister, but also almost any politician nowadays, and at

best the response will be a shrug of the shoulders, but, more likely, something a lot fruitier.

While the reputation of our politicians has been low for a number of years, such was the dashed hope that Keir Starmer would be so much better than the incompetent Tories, the reputation of our main parties is in a collectively terrible place.

Trump's flurry of executive orders within hours of his inauguration, most obviously cracking down on illegal migration, landed well with people on this side of the Atlantic who share similar concerns and feel our own politicians are incapable of acting on them.

The mere fact that Trump was seen to be taking dramatic action as soon as he entered the White House wins him significant favor with working-class voters, particularly in the Midlands and the North.

We found a similar phenomenon in the early days of Trump's first term in office. At that time, Britain was in a similar period of stagnation. The public had voted for Brexit but Theresa May was failing to secure a decent Brexit deal, and was struggling to implement any sort of domestic policy agenda after her devastating failure in the 2017 election.

At that time, in focus groups we ran, we would hear endless disapproving comments about his personal conduct and even his broader political views, but "at least he gets things done". There was this sense that Trump was a dodgy sort of man, but, whatever his flaws, he cut through the endless stasis.

While he was ejected from office in 2020 – and dragged through a series of court cases that were expected to kill any hope of a return – that sense of Trump the "Action Man" lingered. In focus groups in 2023, we heard comments from irritated Tory voters, exasperated with Rishi Sunak's failure to turn things around, along similar lines.

Memorably, addressing a focus group in Bolton, Josephine, a 64-year-old sales assistant said (to nods of agreement from fellow participants):

> *"I would like to see a British version of Trump, personally… he put America first. He did the gas pipeline, he did [stuff] on immigration. Even though he's a millionaire, I could relate to Trump. I could sit here and have a conversation with him and listen to him and believe him. Whereas our politicians, I don't trust them one bit. I just think they just go with the flow, say*

> *what they think they want to hear, but there's no action."*

Leanne, a middle-aged hairdresser, agreed, saying that Britain needs "someone like Trump" because he would "get the job done". She said:

> *"Our prime ministers have given us a lot of false promises, basically lied to us, told us to do one thing when they do another. Where, with Trump, as crazy as he is, you know what you're getting with him. And I think the UK does need someone like that, to sort the country out."*

All of this makes it less surprising that voters would back policies such as declaring a "border emergency" in the Channel, just as Trump has done on the US's southern frontier with Mexico.

Undoubtedly, by not mentioning that these were Trump's policies, the poll will have lulled those who strongly dislike the US president into expressing support for his agenda.

But, based on my experience talking particularly to working-class voters who backed Brexit in 2016, none of them could have cared less whose policies they were.

The scale of disaffection in Britain towards our political class spells trouble for the main parties at the next election, who might find it difficult to change the perception that they repeatedly fail to achieve significant change for the better.

Ultimately, voters just want to see a politician make a promise and deliver on it – hence the members of our focus groups expressing support for a "Trump-like-figure" rather than coveting Trump himself.

Britain, however, remains Britain. In an ideal world, people would actually prefer to have a sort of political version of Sir David Attenborough. He is much more to the taste of British voters. But it would seem that desperate times call for desperate measures.

That means people in Britain are looking to politicians to act decisively over key issues, as Trump does. Does Nigel Farage and his Reform Party come to mind?

Ed Shackle is Head of Qualitative Research at Public First in London. This article was first published in the Daily Telegraph today (1/29).